



State of Wisconsin
Governor Scott Walker

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Ben Brancel, Secretary

Department of Financial Institutions
Ray Allen, Secretary



DATCP/DFI NEWS RELEASE: Give, But Don't Get Taken: Watch for Holiday Charity Scams

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MADISON – For many people, the holidays are as much about giving generously to different charities as they are for giving gifts to friends and family. For scammers, the holidays are a chance to take advantage of your goodwill through fraudulent charities with high-pressure pitches. Two state agencies are asking consumers to research charities before making a donation and to be on guard against phone- and Internet-based requests for contributions.

“Scammers can lay it on pretty thick this time of year,” said Frank Frassetto, Division Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection for the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). “They know that aggressive, emotional appeals are effective during the holidays, so keep a level head if asked for an on-the-spot donation.”

George Althoff, Communications Director for the Department of Financial Institutions (DFI), encouraged consumers to do their homework on charitable organizations when considering a donation.

“A good measuring stick is determining what percentage of an organization’s donations are used for programs and services,” Althoff said. “Charities that are well-run generally are ones that are spending a higher percentage of their funds raised on programs and services, as opposed to overhead costs.”

Financial information about charitable organizations’ level of spending on program activities can be found on the DFI website at www.wdfi.org/CharitableOrganizations, Althoff said.

DATCP and DFI offer up these tips for donors considering a donation to a charitable organization:

- Before donating, check to see if the charity is registered with DFI.
- If contacted by phone, avoid being pressured to make an immediate donation. Don’t hesitate to ask the caller to send you information about the organization and its programs.
- Ask a solicitor to explain the purpose of the organization, what services are provided, how much of the donation goes to fund-raising expenses, whether the donation is tax-deductible, and whether you will be sent a receipt.
- Donate to charities that you trust and are well-established.
- To trick consumers into making donations, scammers will often use names and websites that are similar to those of better-known, reputable organizations. Watch the spelling closely.

(MORE)

- Be wary of unsolicited requests for donations, especially ones received via the Internet.
- Criminals know that many people make year-end charitable contributions for tax purposes, so they may use that as a tool in locking down a payment.
- Never write out a check or give cash to an individual solicitor. Write out checks to the name of the organization or use a credit card.

For more information or to file a complaint, consumers may contact:

- DATCP on the web at datcp.wi.gov; by phone (Consumer Information Hotline) at 800-422-7128; by e-mail at datcphotline@wisconsin.gov; or at www.facebook.com/wiconsumer.
- DFI on the web at www.wdfi.org/CharitableOrganizations; by phone at 800-452-3328; or by e-mail at DFISecretary@wisconsin.gov.

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